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ABSTRACT

In a national survey of psychological testing, researchers have suggested that future surveys of test use should report separately for individual settings. The purpose of this investigation was to gauge the status of psychological test usage in a specific type of agency. Outpatient mental health facilities and community clinics in the United States were selected and surveyed during the spring/summer of 1988. From 900 facilities with a psychologist on staff, 413 questionnaires were received. The findings revealed that the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory and Wechsler Scales were the most frequently used instruments, closely followed by the major projective techniques. The Wide Range Achievement Test, the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, the Beck Depression Inventory, and the Wechsler Memory Scale were also found to be quite popular. Apparently, clinicians rely on traditional tests despite the proliferation of new assessment instruments in the clinical literature. Overall, the findings seem to indicate that the assessment of intelligence, developmental abilities, and personality are important functions of outpatient mental health facilities. Neuropsychological and vocational evaluation seem to play a secondary role. The training programs are apparently preparing clinicians in instruction on the most popular assessment instruments. (Author/ABL)

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PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING PATTERNS IN MENTAL HEALTH CLINICS AND SERVICES

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Abstract

surveyed psychological testing trends in outpatient mental health centers, clinics, and services in the United States. The sample was obtained from the National Directory of Mental Health and the National Registry of Community Mental Health Services. From 900 facilities with a psychologist on staff, 413 questionnaires were received for a response rate of 46 percent. The MMPI and Wechsler Scales were the most frequently used instruments, closely followed by the major projective techniques. The WRAT, Peabody, Beck Depression Inventory, and Wechsler Memory Scale were also found to be quite popular. Apparently, clinicians rely on traditional tests despite the proliferation of new assessment instruments in the clinical literature. Implications for graduate training were discussed.

In a national survey of test usage, Lubin, Larsen, Matarazzo, and Seever (1985) suggested that future surveys of test use should report separately for individual settings. In surveying regional outpatient mental health facilities, Piotrowski and Keller (1978) found that traditional techniques of assessment, including projectives, were quite popular. Since the Lubin et al. survey was conducted in 1982 (and published in 1985), a 5-year update of testing patterns of mental health facilities would seem desirable since (a) the use of computer-based testing software programs have recently increased; (b) many new instruments have been introduced in the research and clinical literature, particularly in the health assessment and child evaluation areas; and (c) a number of community mental health centers have been acquired by private health enterprises. Since testing is time-consuming and expensive, it would be of interest to investigate how the profit motive has affected assessment practices in a cost-effective environment.

The purpose of the present investigation was to gauge the status of psychological test usage in a specific type agency (as suggested by Lubin et al.). Outpatient mental health facilities and community clinics in the United States were selected and surveyed during the Spring/Summer of 1988.

Method

The survey form consisted of a checklist for reporting the frequency of use (Never, Occasionally, Moderately, Frequently, Always) of 40 testing instruments selected from prior surveys and current clinical literature. An addendum afforded respondents the opportunity to report tests not included on the checklist. The mailing sample were all mental health facilities listed in The National Directory of Mental Health and The National Registry of Mental Health Services (excluding AA and drug abuse clinics, and secular-affiliated clinics) with a psychologist on staff. Survey forms were sent to the Clinical Directors of 900 facilities; of the 420 returns, 413 were found usable for an adjusted response rate of 46 percent. All 50 states plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico were represented.

Two indices utilized in prior surveys, Total Mentions (TM) and Weighted Score (WS) were the methods of computation in the present study. The Total Mentions indicated the sum of the usage ratings for all respondents. The Weighted Score represented the number of respondents who mentioned the specific frequency of use multiplied by the numerical rating (Occasionally - 1, Moderately - 2, Frequently - 3, Always - 4) and then summing across all four frequencies.

Insert Table 1 about here

Results and Discussion

Table 1 presents the rank order of the 30 most frequently used test instruments based on TM and WS scores. The MMPI was the most popular objective assessment measure with over half of all respondents selecting the "frequently" category. Several other broad-band personality tests (16 PF, California Psychological Inventory) were used sparingly. Five projective techniques (Human Figure Drawings, Sentence Completion, House-Tree-Person, the Rorschach, and TAT) were also quite popular and ranked in the top ten in terms of overall usage. The Wechsler scales, Wide Range Achievement Test, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and Vineland Social Maturity Scale were frequently used ability and maturational assessment instruments. Although the Bender-Gestalt and Wechsler Memory Scale were popular neuropsychological screening instruments, full batteries (Halstead-Reitan and Luria Nebraska) were either infrequently used or used only in part. Moreover, The Benton Visual Retention Test and the Graham-Kendall Memory-for-Designs were used only occasionally. Of interest, most of the newer testing instruments (e.g., Jesness Inventory, Rogers CRAS, Children's Depression Inventory, and pain instruments) were used infrequently. Several instruments were mentioned in the addendum section as being used frequently. The following were mentioned by 15 or more respondents: the Millon Adolescent Personality Inventory, Shipley Institute of Living Scale, Slosson Intelligence Test, Peabody Individual Achievement Test, Roberts Apperception Test, and the Developmental Test of Visual Motor Integration (Beery).

The present results corroborate the findings of earlier surveys of community mental health centers and clinics (Brown & McGuire, 1976; Lubin et al., 1985; Piotrowski & Keller, 1978); i.e., the MMPI, Wechsler Scales, Bender-Gestalt, Human Figure Drawings, House-Tree-Person, Rorschach, TAT, and Sentence Completion were found to be ranked in the top ten instruments in these earlier surveys as well as in the present investigation. These findings also parallel testing practices of professional clinicians (Piotrowski, Keller, & Sherry, 1985; Tuma & Pratt, 1982) and practitioners in inpatient settings (Sweeney, Clarkin, & Fitzgibbon, 1987). Apparently, clinicians still rely on traditional assessment instruments that include the MMPI, Wechsler Scales, and projective techniques (for review see Piotrowski, 1984).

Overall, the findings seem to indicate that the assessment of intelligence, developmental abilities, and personality are important functions of outpatient mental health facilities. Neuropsychological and vocational evaluation seem to play a secondary role. On the other hand, it appears that the proliferation of new tests and assessment instruments has not yet been accepted by community mental health clinicians. Compared to our earlier survey of mental health facilities (Piotrowski & Keller, 1978), it seems that testing trends have not changed much over the last decade. The importance of the diagnostic function of clinical personnel at community mental health centers continues to be stressed (O'Donohue, Curtis, & Fisher, 1985).

Are training programs preparing clinicians in instruction on the most popular assessment instruments? Apparently so. Several recent surveys of APA-approved clinical psychology programs and internships found that the MMPI, child assessment, and projective techniques are considered important areas of focus and instruction (Durand, Blanchard, & Mindell, 1988; Elbert & Holden, 1987; Piotrowski & Keller, 1984; Ritzler & Alter, 1986).

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Table 1
Rank Order by Weighted Score for the 30 Most Frequently Used Tests (N=413)

Test Instrument	Total Mentions	Weighted Score	Weighted Score Rank
MMPI	394	1024	1
WAIS-R	400	909	2
Bender-Gestalt	377	833	3
WISC-R/ WPPSI	365	823	4
Human-Figure Drawings	366	800	5
Sentence Completion (all kinds)	356	714	6
House-Tree-Person	338	677	7
Rorschach	353	621	8
Thematic Apperception Test	362	596	9
Wide Range Achievement Test	316	588	10
Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test	268	397	11
Beck Depression Inventory	249	394	12
Wechsler Memory Scale	251	388	13
Children's Apperception Test	261	387	14
Vineland Social Maturity Scale	267	377	15
Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale	230	307	16
Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory	189	239	17
16 PF Questionnaire	157	225	18
MCMI/ MCMI-II	108	198	19
Personality Inventory for Children	124	191	20

Table 1 (continued)

Test Instrument	Total Mentions	Weighted Score	Weighted Score Rank
Benton Visual Retention Test	134	180	21
Halstead-Reitan Neuropsychological Battery	122	166	22
Memory for Designs/Graham Kendall	130	165	23
Luria-Nebraska Neuropsychological Battery	115	138	24
California Psychological Inventory	99	116	25
Interview for Recent Life Events	83	110	26
Millon Behavioral Health Inventory	68	88	27
Taylor Manifest Anxiety Scale	69	79	28
SCL-90/ SCL-90-R	39	76	29
Children's Depression Inventory	55	73	30